

## **BACKGROUND**

SB 1380 (Chapter 335/2000), authored by Senator Martha Escutia, directed “the Superintendent of Public Instruction to enter into a contract with an independent contractor for the purpose of conducting a study to determine the feasibility of reorganizing the Los Angeles Unified School District by removing from that district the schools in the southeast area of the district, including those schools located in Bell, Southgate, Cudahy, Maywood, Huntington Park, Vernon, and the unincorporated areas of Florence/Graham and Walnut Park. This study shall assess the potential benefits and disadvantages that would result from such a reorganization of the district.”

Nigro Nigro & White, LLP (NNW) was awarded the contract through a competitive bid process coordinated through the California Department of Education, School Fiscal Services Division, Office of District Organization and Charter Schools. NNW is an independent certified public accounting firm that specializes in auditing and consulting services, including school district organization, for K-14 public education in California. In addition to the NNW team members Christy White, Jeff Nigro and Ann Cox; NNW subcontracted with Karin Lynch of the Pulliam Group, an educational consulting group, Dan Reibson, a leading statewide expert in school district organization, and Carl Bergstrom, a management and organization consultant. Appendix E contains additional company information and resumes of the study team members.

### **Description of Study Area (the Southeast Area)**

SB 1380 (Chapter 335/2000) established the study area as: the cities of Bell, South Gate, Cudahy, Maywood, Huntington Park, and Vernon, and the unincorporated areas of Florence/Graham and Walnut Park.

Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) is comprised of 11 regions, called Districts. The districts are identified as A-K. The District J's boundaries appear to be exactly aligned with the city boundaries specified in SB 1380 as the study area, except for a small unincorporated area east of Wilmington Street that is part of Florence/Graham and Walnut Park areas.

This unincorporated area, to be included within the study, continues west of Huntington Park and Cudahy to Central Avenue and south to 79th Street, and includes one small section that extends down to 81st street, from Washington to 1/2 block east of Crockett. This description was confirmed by Senator Escutia's office – the author of SB 1380. The unincorporated area of Florence/Graham is within District I.

There are 3 District I schools (Edison, Miramonte and Parmelee Ave.) included in the study area in addition to all District J schools. A map of LAUSD's district and the study area is included in Appendix A-1.

### **District Statistics and Organization**

Los Angeles Unified School District has approximately 723,000 pupils that are served in over 900 school sites, magnet schools and centers, skill centers, alternative schools, adult schools, special education centers and children centers. There are approximately 60 administrative sites. There are over 75,000 employees.

There are 40 school sites included within the study area: all of District J (35 sites, plus 2 adult schools) and a small portion of District I (3 sites). In addition to the school sites, there is the Alameda garage and a temporary maintenance and operations facility. There are no administrative facilities within the study area.

Within the Southeast area schools, there are an estimated 67,700 pupils (2000-01 district data) in grades K-12, 9.4% of the total number of pupils in LAUSD.

NNW researched the background of the District through interviews with district representatives and a review of organizational charts. This background information assisted the study team in understanding the operations of the district, the District's mission and goals, and the organizational environment in which the Southeast Area (primarily District J) operates. The following is a description of LAUSD's recent reorganization plan.

### **LAUSD's Reorganization Plan**

In 2000/01 the Los Angeles Unified School District reorganized into eleven districts with the intent to create three fundamental changes:

1. Reconstitute the central offices as a tactical support, service and compliance monitoring system.
2. Create eleven local districts. Give them control over resources; autonomy to make the vast majority of their decisions about the instruction of children, and accountability for improving student achievement.
3. Focus the local district's instructional and professional development priorities on reading at all grade levels.

According to LAUSD's published information about the plan, the overall benefits of the plan were intended to be: a) an opportunity for improved student achievement; b) instructional leadership improvement; c) better parent/community access to schools; d) better customer service; d) more accountability; and e) better use of resources.

The first change—reconstituting the central office—was planned to result in: central office focus on tactical support for key services and compliance monitoring; an organizational structure stressing maximum decentralization; and a business-like senior management structure that included selection of the general superintendent. Key central office divisions in educational services, planning, assessment, research, human services, information technology, and finance would support the local districts.

Through the second change, creating eleven local districts, LAUSD sought to: establish strong parent/community linkages to the local districts; rotate positions to bring in fresh ideas and avoid administrative entitlement; provide accountability for improving student achievement; and put control, autonomy, and budget resources at the local district level. This would primarily be achieved by having a local district Superintendent with functional units in local districts, including instructional support services, school services and business services.

Finally, the third change would ask local districts to take a strategic approach to improving reading through initially articulating measurable goals for all schools. Decisions on the use of appropriate research-based improvement practices would be based on data about student achievement. Districts would implement standards-based curriculum and instructional programs; and ensure the implementation of comprehensive reading programs in all classrooms. This would occur through a plan outlining the use of resources to improve student achievement, and the plan would provide for appropriate professional development and parent education. The Districts would work closely and collaboratively with the communities served, keeping the focus on student achievement.

As of the date of this report, LAUSD has effectively reorganized into the eleven districts and started a process of decentralizing certain services, e.g. staff development, community outreach and some business services. However, many services remain centrally controlled. As discussed more under Criterion #6, Educational Programs, the District has made measurable strides in reading and the implementation of standards-based curriculum.